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Dance and Wellbeing in Vancouver's 'A Healthy City for All'

Abstract

Through the lens of the dancing body, this paper examines practices of health and wellbeing produced in response to City of Vancouver urban governance policies. In particular, it calls attention to the legislative onslaught by city government in the years abutting the 2010 Winter Olympics to cultivate and manage healthy people, communities, and environments. In an effort to sell Vancouver's 'liveability', I argue City of Vancouver endorsed a new legislative alliance that merged a conspicuously Anglo-American wellbeing lexicon, favouring individual responsibility and self-governance, with the performing arts industries. Drawing upon interviews and performance-based research, the paper illustrates how Karen Jamieson's community dance project *Connect*, created for the *In the Heart of the City* festival, embodies Vancouver's tri-level legislative ambitions to nurture *A Healthy City For All*. This materialised through the crafting of a dance-health body practice (healthy people), by choreographing a sense of belonging with 'at risk' communities (healthy communities), and in the uniting of the arts and health professions in the process of 'cleaning up' disenfranchised neighbourhoods (healthy environments). In bringing together scholarship on cultures of wellbeing and creative dance practice, the article contributes to understandings of how the health-seeking subject is embodied and performed. It also offers a productive critique of the exclusionary nature of urban health legislation, and of the contested role artists and arts festivals can play in nurturing urban wellbeing and normalising inequalities.

Key Words

Creative city, dance, health, governance, Vancouver, wellbeing

1 Introduction

Jamieson encourages me to set roots in the ground, like a tree. I feel through my toes and attempt to 'anchor' myself. She encourages me to be present in the studio, in space, and myself. I'm asked to visualise taking energy from the ground and experience it travelling, restoratively, upwards through my body. I attempt to synchronise my breath as I move to facilitate inner calm and a sense of wellbeing. Imitating Karen, I plié (bend), feet in parallel, and am told to engage the sitting bone. My arms

coordinate, pushing towards the floor, palms-down, as I exhale and transfer energy out of my body in a meditative enactment of synchronised movement, breath, and internalised rejuvenation.

This opening vignette, taken from my field journal working alongside the Vancouver-based Karen Jamieson Dance Company (KJDC), paints a clear picture of the relationship between choreographed movement and personal wellbeing. Drawing upon 10 semi-structured interviews and three months of performance-based research with the company (including participation and observation of technique training, choreography, and performance discussed elsewhere [author]), this paper examines the multiple ways in which dance was mobilised as an embodied practice for nurturing individual and community wellbeing among residents of the Downtown Eastside (DTES). Jamieson's creation of a health-oriented artistic practice is shown to have evolved during participatory dance classes with the neighbourhood's Carnegie Dance Troupe. The resulting choreography, *Connect*, placed particular emphasis on participants embodying and performing wellbeing, and was staged during the neighbourhood's 2012 *In The Heart of the City* festival. Initiated by the community in 2003, this annual event promotes creativity and improved wellbeing in a neighbourhood that Canada's media (and politicians) has tended to characterise in sensationalist, racialised and classed language, as a place of violence and socio-spatial deprivation (see Blomley, 1997; Smith, 2003; Sommers and Blomley, 2002; Proudfoot, 2011; also see McLean, 2014b). Jamieson has occupied an on-going artistic presence within this community, having created a series of choreographies for the resident-run festival (responding to issues from gentrification to racism), and steered over 20 years of community-led dance practice with its residents. The paper's consideration of performativities of wellbeing therefore emerged out of the empirical research conducted, rather than as a result of those discourses, policies, and practices of urban wellbeing being imposed on the choreography.

At the heart of the paper is a concern with the complex and contested relationship between dance practice and the corporeal nurturing of individual and community wellbeing. I work, in particular, with the dancing body, technique training, and performance to explore how community participants proactively *embodied* and *performed* a conspicuously Anglo-American health-seeking subjectivity. I suggest that post-2008, City of Vancouver (COV) strategically mobilised health within its urban governance agenda, but more unusually, embarked upon a healthy living culture through a purposeful alignment with the performance industries. Technologies designed to encourage individuals to ‘work on themselves’ as part of a pursuit of health (see Crawford, 1980; LeBesco, 2011; White et al., 1995), were concurrently, accompanied by a morally charged urban health lexicon, aimed at alleviating those downtown neighbourhoods perceived as failing. While the geographical literature has seen contributions which analyse critically the cultivation of the healthy subject and city (see Ayo, 2012; Carter, 2015; Evans et al., 2012; Herricks, 2009), this paper extends those debates by analysing the growing role of the arts in the co-creation, and subsequent selling, of Vancouver as a healthy, ‘liveable’ urban environment. In this respect, I contend that urban and performance geographers alike have had little to say about the complex relationship between public health strategies and ‘creative’ practices (specifically dance). Nor have they accounted for the ambiguous, even complicit, role artists play in advancing the material and imaginative geographies of urban health legislation (see McLean, 2014a, 2014b for a notable exception). In response, I work across urban geographies and the geographies of performance and uncover how an arts-health alliance has evolved; question the degree to which this union has advanced Vancouver’s international ‘healthy living’ agenda; and open a space to analyse the extent to which artists can resist, creatively, urban health campaigns.

In order to do so, the body of the paper is divided into three sections. In the first section, I introduce the responsible health-seeking neoliberal subject, and uncover a moral

imperative underpinning pursuits of health. From here, I account for the contradictory role creative individuals and arts festivals play in nurturing healthy cities and citizens. Second, I outline the alliance between the health and performance industries as it materialised in Vancouver's *A Healthy City For All: Vancouver's Healthy City Strategy* (2014-2025). The final section works with and through the choreography *Connect* to explore how health and the performing arts have been mobilised strategically in the DTES to promote the tri-level objectives of the *Healthy City Strategy* (see Figure 1). This comprised of the crafting, and subsequent embodiment of a dance-health body regime entitled the Energy Body Practice (Healthy People); in the transformation of 'vulnerable' communities through creative, cross-cultural practices of inclusion and belonging (Healthy Communities); and in the roll-out of an arts-health alliance as part of an effort to 'uplift' and 'clean up' the DTES community (Healthy Environments). Rather than suggest that artists are solely complicit in the production of gentrification and the normalisation of inequalities (see Harvie, 2005; Levin and Solga, 2009), I enlist the latter to tease through the contradictory role dance performance can play in contesting urban health policies. This, I reason, has broader societal implications for thinking ethically about government's solicitation of artists within urban planning practices; both in terms of cultivating apolitical healthy subjects (detached from the underlying conditions of urban poverty and precarity), but also in recruiting marginal participants as performers of artistic-led urban rejuvenation while simultaneously hastening their exclusion from the city (i.e. through beatification and a slow pricing out of the poor).

2 The health-seeking neoliberal subject

"Who needs therapy when we can just dance. This is good for our souls!"

In order to understand the contemporary prevalence of the health-seeking subject, I situate dance training within recent scholarship on health and wellbeing, and the cultivation of particular ‘technologies of the self’ as a defining symptom of contemporary neoliberalism (see Langley, 2007; Leitner *et al.*, 2007; Nadesan, 2008; Petersen, 2002). Within this literature, the rhetoric of individualism and responsibility speaks to the wider transition from government to governance, and reflects an escalating proclivity toward the government of the individual (Painter, 2011; Stoker, 1998; also see Read, 2009). Such explanations draw particular inspiration from Michel Foucault’s theories of governmentality and biopolitics, and stress neoliberalism’s central role in the governance of the self by the self (Langley, 2006). Endorsed by a growth in ‘new age’ and alternative health practices, discourses of elicit, promote, foster, and encourage are argued to have replaced the violent disciplining of bodies to bring about the contemporary, self-governing, neoliberal subject (Barnett *et al.*, 2008; MacLeavy, 2008). So to, the geography underpinning technologies of governance have transformed, favouring practices conducted at a distance, or through indirect techniques such as targets, outcomes, and rankings (see Leitner *et al.*, 2007; Rose, 1999).

Recognition of neoliberalism’s critical role in the production of subjectivity has led scholars from across the breadth of human geography to investigate the multiple neoliberal subjects called forth under the current political-economic milieu (see Ahmed, 2004; Bradley, 2007; Fluri, 2014; Gallagher, 2015; MacLeavy, 2008). The current proclivity toward a conspicuously Anglo-American health-seeking subject however finds important nuances with economic geographer’s interest in the post-2000 financial subject (Hall, 2011; see Aitken, 2007). For Paul Langley (2004), social technologies (e.g. securing mortgages), alongside warnings by governments against the inadequacy of state pensions has called forth new self-disciplined, ‘investor subjects’ (see Langley, 2006, 2007; French and Kneale, 2009). These individuals are positioned as morally responsibility for managing risk and ensuring their own

financial wellbeing during periods of uncertainty (Beck, 1992; Leitner *et al.*, 2007). Integrating literatures on financialisation and the biopolitical, French and Kneale (2012) have successfully bridged the divide between economic geography and the geographies of wellbeing. Specifically, the authors uncover the emergence of new modalities of ‘lifestyle insurance’, which, they suggest, rewards the ill and intemperate for their poor health. A financial rewarding of ‘irresponsible behaviour’ inevitably stands in stark contrast to the dominant message of neoliberal health campaigns, and the escalating wellness discourse characteristic of Western societies (see Carter, 2015; Corburn, 2009; Crawshaw, 2007; Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero, 2008; Guthman and DuPuis, 2006; Herrick, 2009).

Attempts to theorise this growing interest in individual pursuits of health have, again, developed upon the writings of Foucault, and stressed the multiple biopolitical tactics employed to act upon, and achieve the subjugation of, bodies (see Ayo, 2012; Brown and Baker, 2012; Petersen, 2002). Although most recently libertarian paternalism has been identified as nudging individuals into adopting socially correct ways of behaving (Andrews *et al.*, 2012; Carter, 2015; Evans *et al.*, 2012; Jones *et al.*, 2011), it is the individualisation of risk which has received sustained attention (see Nadesan, 2008; Rose, 1990). Within this school of thought, citizens are exhorted to practice and, by extension, consume a variety of personal disciplines to prevent their poor health. This may include the adoption of reduced-fat diets, the purchase (and to varying degrees, use) of athletic clothing, running shoes, and yoga mats, self-directed education by means of the latest celebrity endorsed exercise DVDs, and the improvement of ones aesthetic appeal through readily available diet pills or bulk-building shakes. Administration of this lucrative wellness industry has been conducted largely through the growth of a professionalised class of specialists (whether therapists or personal trainers). Accredited for their superior health knowledge, these experts are encouraged to offer their ‘services through the free market’ to the responsible, health-conscious citizen who is expected

to buy into them (Ayo, 2012: 102; see Chriss, 1999; Masuda et al., 2012; Miller and Rose, 1994; Nolan, 1998). Against the backdrop of an abounding healthscape, a sense of urgency is fostered, necessitating that the neoliberal subject take action as part of his/her duty to the self and to the state (Beck, 1992; see Fukuyama, 1998; Giddens, 1991; Stokes, 2008).

A moral imperative thus lies at the heart of the healthy lifestyle culture and efforts to embody it. Notably, socio-economic values of responsibility, prudence, hard work, and asceticism come to be articulated through an individual's physical and emotional pursuit of wellness (see Greco, 1993; Petersen, 2002). As a visual demonstration of an individual's 'will power', the healthy body thus achieves an elevated status and operates as a powerful testament to those who deserve to succeed (Crawford, 1994; see Dorney, 2011; Guthman and DuPuis, 2006). What is perhaps most problematic about such endeavours is the paradoxical amalgamation of a hedonistic lifestyle with ascetic practices aimed merely at the *appearance* of health (Dutton, 1995; see Ayo, 2012). Reified by public and political fears over an obesity crisis, discourses of slimness and muscularity, svelte and athletic, fat-busters and calorie counters materialise as metaphors for moral worth (Herrick, 2009; see Evans et al., 2012; Guthman, 2009, 2011; White *et al.*, 1995; or failure; see Zanker and Gard, 2008). Individuals demonstrating 'bad' personal choices – such as consuming drugs, cigarettes, alcohol, and fast foods – are, by contrast, stigmatised as socially irresponsible and a future burden on society's health care system (Crawford 1980; Dworkin and Wachs, 2009; see Ayo, 2012; Henderson, 2012).¹ The implications are twofold. First, this notion of healthism effectively reinforces aesthetic and moral judgements around rational behaviour and self-control, enabling governments to position health as a responsibility rather than personal right. Second, the language of personal irresponsibility works to collapse 'fatness' into 'unhealthy' (Elliott, 2007) with the effect of conveniently glossing over the socially exclusionary nature of neoliberal health promotion efforts (see Herrick, 2009; LeBesco, 2011; Malley, 2014;

Marmot, 2005; Rawlins, 2008). Government's failure to address the underlying socio-spatial conditions contributing to inequalities in health can, moreover, work to politicise deprived areas as sick, deviant, and irresponsible, and consequently, justify an array of intervention strategies aimed at their positive transformation (see Levin and Solga, 2009).

Indeed, as governments across the Global North have prioritised the role of health legislation in coercing individuals in adopting health-enhancing practices, many have concurrently broadened their focus and turned to creative cities policies and a broad spectrum of artists to 'up-lift' impoverished 'sick' neighbourhoods. Large-scale corporate international arts festivals alongside neighbourhood-based arts and culture festivals have become particularly persuasive examples of a city's liveability. They have also increasingly been mobilised within place marketing strategies (McLean, 2014; see Harvey, 1989). Turning to the Canadian context, the public arts funding strategy post-1990, has been to invest in mega-events that promise economic development and attract mobile capital (McLean, 2014b: 2159; McLean, 2009; also see Evans, 2009; Landry, 2008; Parker, 2008; Peck, 2011). More often than not, these large-scale financial investments have focused upon disenfranchised neighbourhoods and marginal segments of the community. Concurrent cuts to arts funding have also necessitated that artists compete for access grants by programming participatory arts intervention that implement artists in 'at risk' communities (Harvie, 2011). The premise in training artists as creative 'entrepreneurs' has been founded largely upon the assumption that such individuals possess the skills necessary for mobilising social inclusion, fostering community wellbeing, enhancing 'lifestyle', and developing entrepreneurial partnerships between small arts organisations and business and corporate donors (Harvie, 2013; see Harvie, 2005; McRobbie, 2011; McLean, 2009; also see Bishop, 2012 on the parallel dismantling of the welfare state).

Mounting criticism has therefore been levelled at artists and arts organisations for

their involvement in staging culture-led neighbourhood-based urban revitalisation strategies, which beautify ‘at risk’ neighbourhoods, in an effort to attract tourists and economic development (see Kern 2013, 2015; Levin and Solga, 2009; McLean and Rahder 2013; McLean, 2014b). Charges levelled at neoliberal inspired creative city festivals include catalysing gentrification, hiking up property prices, and securitising neighbourhoods for middle class tastes (see Landry, 2012; McLean, 2014a). Geographers and performance scholars interested in gender and race have also critiqued community-engaged arts practices for being complicit in normalising social inequalities and solidifying morally charged claims of individual failure. Jen Harvie (2005) most notably proposed that urban revitalisation-oriented festivals re-enact colonial discourse of ‘cleaning up’ immoral, dark, urban environments, naturalising racial exclusion. They can also see artists solicited into presenting government validated illusions of cross-cultural harmony, or create events that enforce the exclusion of those ‘othered’ bodies (from prostitutes to racialised bodies) that fail to conform to the healthscape being presented (see Leslie and Catungal, 2012; Levin and Solga, 2009). Such festivals may also raise significant ethical concerns about the ‘missionary-like’ role of festivalgoers and, in particular, their position as ‘saviour, healing the neighbourhood with civically engaged culture’ (McLean, 2014b: 2168).

Despite recognition of artists’ complicity in promoting regeneration and the production of inequalities, critical dialogue has equally accounted for the multiple ways in which arts practices challenge urban upgrading initiatives. Heather McLean (2014b) offers a particularly useful account of the counter-spaces carved out by youth participants of Toronto’s Luminato’s festival to voice their negative experiences of urban revitalisation and the exclusivity of creative city policies (also see Kern, 2013, 2015; McLean, 2014b). Extending upon this research, this paper asserts the embodied, inherently performative qualities of the dancing body to push back at healthy living strategies and to provide a stage

for its contestation. For those communities at risk from arts-led urban regeneration, this can have valuable implications for reaffirming the role of the artist as urban activist, but, also, the political possibility of community festivals to display *publically* the needs and concerns of its participants. Before I turn to the dancing body however, I tease through Vancouver's arts-health alliance as it has emerged within its 2014-2025 healthy city strategy.

3 A Health City For All

'Vancouver is a city known the world over for living active healthy lifestyles. Where having a yoga membership seems to be a requirement for residency, people are more likely to spend their weekends running on the seawall than sitting on their couch.' (Healthy Living Vancouver, 2014)

The hosting of the 2010 Winter Olympics marked a definitive shift in Vancouver's urban health agenda. Augmented by numerous city government initiatives, including the ten-year *Cultural Plan for Vancouver* (2008-2018) and the *Great Beginnings: Old Streets, New Pride Project*' (2008-), public and political debate became characterised by an escalating health consciousness. Under the spotlight of the Games, and as the above healthscape depicts, COV mobilised wellbeing as central to the marketability of the city (see Kennelly and Watt, 2011; Vanwynsberghe *et al.*, 2013). Part of this aim was to cultivate self-governing subjects who responsibly managed their own health (MacLeavy, 2008; Nadesan, 2008; Petersen, 2002; Rose, 1990) by participating in outdoor pursuits, healthy behavioural practices (eating well, living tobacco free), and building community connections. Practices of health included the self-indulgent consumption of health goods and services; from the 62 vegan-friendly restaurants in the city, to the city's pro-feminine curve hugging, fitness clothing brands of Beyond Yoga and Lululemon, to partaking in the city's extensive yoga market, to seeking wellness advice from the numerous Vancouver-based websites dedicated to healthy living

(including Healthy Living Vancouver, 2014 and Healthy Living Program; VCH, 2014; also see Ayo, 2012; Lavrence and Lozanski, 2014; VegGuide, 2015).

Urban wellness was, at the same time, tactically mobilised by COV to present the metropolis as an economically competitive, attractive and ‘liveable city’ (particularly for young, mobile, creative, entrepreneurial class). As Evans et al., (2012) have noted, measures of health (such as obesity prevalence indices; see Shannon, 2014) function as key indicators in national economic competition among cities, mainly the competition for attracting skilled labour. The investment of Can \$3 million between 2007 and 2010 to Cultural Services portrays the substantial efforts taken to brand the Olympic city as a ‘liveable’ cultural landscape. At the heart of this imaginary was an emphasis on the host city’s ‘pristine urban nature, multicultural social harmony, and (its) vibrant local cultures’ (McCallum *et al.*, 2005). Between 2007 and 2011, this investment was rewarded through its number one ranking as the most ‘liveable city’ in the world. Over the ensuing five years, Vancouver’s unrelenting commitment to urban wellbeing persisted, and has been reflected in numerous metropolitan health rankings (and its on-going appeal to a particular type of ‘creative’, health-seeking citizen). In 2012, the *Siemens Green City Index*, which brought together nine categories to measure the environmental performance of 27 major urban spaces across North America, and their commitment to reducing their future environmental impact, placed the city second (see Punter, 2003). By 2015, the *Quality of Living Survey* ranked Vancouver first in North America for offering high standards of living (Mercer, 2015).

Yet, what is potentially unusual about Vancouver is how, amidst these coalescing agendas of calling forth health-seeking subjects, and attracting the creative class and the investor dollar, the city has mobilised the performance industries. Marked by their ability to take initiative, risk, innovate, and affect impact, artists are ever more positioned as ‘culturepreneurs’, capable of driving economic innovation and growth (Harvie, 2013; also see

Kern, 2013, 2015; McLean, 2014a, 2014b). COV (2015) expands, ‘a vibrant arts and culture scene is a critical part of a healthy and liveable city’. As home to the highest number of artists per capita in Canada, in addition to a well-established cultural system incorporating organisations, festivals, businesses (‘Hollywood North’), and communities, the arts in Vancouver contribute directly to the city’s overall cultural and economic attractiveness; facilitating education, promoting health and healing, creating community connections, and enhancing the [area’s](#) economic strength (ArtsBC, 2013). ‘Each type of activity plays a different but important role in improving our individual and collective wellbeing’ and includes fostering ‘a sense of belonging, ownership, pride, engagement, and social capital’ (COV, 2015; Hills Strategies, 2013).

This valorisation of the arts in facilitating individual health and community wellbeing has been mirrored by changes to arts funding [in](#) Canada more broadly. [Across all levels of government, funding](#) criteria have increasingly stipulated that artists engage ‘creatively’ with communities through the likes of participatory practice (see Bishop, 2012; Harvie, 2013; Jackson, 2011). At the federal level, ‘public engagement in the arts’ became a major theme of Canada Council’s 2011-2016 Strategic Plan, [while, at the provincial level](#), B.C. Arts Council announced its commitment to strengthening ‘community engagement within arts and cultural communities’ in its 2012-2013 Annual Report (BCAC, 2013; Canada Council, 2010). [For the city of Vancouver, the recent launch of the *Artists in Communities Grant* reflects local government’s corresponding pledge to support strategies for including diverse members of the community in artistic practices in ways that generate ‘lasting social legacies’](#) (COV, 2016b). It is worth noting that [Connect](#) was funded by each of these levels of government.

Quantification of the ‘successful’ arts-health alliance (and its role in promoting individual and [community belonging](#)) has emerged in reports including the *Arts and Individual Wellbeing in Canada 39th Report*. The 2010 document, which statistically

examined the relationship between Canadian's cultural activities and their personal wellbeing, identified a positive correlation between cultural activities and eight indicators of wellbeing; including health, mental health, feeling stressed, and overall satisfaction (Hill Strategies, 2013; see Crawford, 2006 on health as 'super-value'). Not only does the prominence given to wellbeing metrics and rankings affirm their intensifying role as neoliberal technologies of governance (see Leitner *et al.*, 2007), but also reduces the potential impact of the arts into quantifiable 'evidence' that can shape (government approved) strategies of 'best practice'. In particular, the generation of 'useable results' within the 2010 report endorsed support, both financially and politically, for cross-collaborative research in 'vulnerable' communities (namely 'restorative' settings like prisons and hospitals). Problematically, the delivery of individual and community wellbeing services is shown to have extended beyond the state, to include a range of entrepreneurial partnerships between artists, not-for-profit organisations, industry, universities, and community groups (see Harvie, 2005; McRobbie, 2011; McLean, 2009; such as Scotiabank Dance Centre's 'artist-in-residency' program). The multiplicity of stakeholders involved in disseminating a healthy lifestyle culture stands as a visible testament to the entrenching reach of neoliberal inspired health discourses into greater areas of social life. It also raises challenging questions about the potential missionary-like function of artists working with 'at risk' individuals and the hierarchies of power cultivated.

In 2014, with the adoption of *A Healthy City For All: Vancouver's Healthy City Strategy*, the integration of the arts into a broader political health objective was most effectively realised. At the core of this most recent legislation is a consolidating effort by COV toward creating healthier people, healthier communities, and a healthier (urban) environment. COV (2014a) explains, 'planning health into our urban environment can do much to increase health and wellbeing for all citizens' (see APHA, 2016 on 'health in all



Figure 1: A Healthy City For All (recreated from information provided at COV, 2014a)

policies' approach being taken in the US). As Figure 1 summarises, on the surface these legislatively coalescing strategies confirm municipal government's cumulative efforts to call forth responsible, self-managing citizens who proactively engage in 'active living', 'engaged citizenship', and 'strong social relationships'. Yet what I also want to suggest is that, crafting individual wellbeing through the language of personal responsibility and reward ran adjacent to attempts to conform those 'unruly' downtown neighbourhoods portrayed as un-conducive to health ([specifically](#) the DTES; see Levin and Solga, 2009). Thus, the legislation's emphasis on a 'well-planned [built](#) environment', 'a thriving economic environment' and 'addressing fear and violence' is indicative of a wider shift in governance toward urban landscapes and subjects.

Through a close reading of Jamieson's *Connect*, I demonstrate how *A Healthy City For All* incorporated a series of targeted strategies endeavouring to 'clean up' the streets of the DTES and 'correct' disruptive citizens. In this way, [I expose](#) the growing role of the performance industries in the co-creation, and subsequent selling, of Vancouver as a healthy urban environment. [Yet equally, through dance practice and choreography, I also explore](#) the creative potential of participatory arts practices, such as Jamieson's [Connect, to call into question](#) neoliberal health campaigns.

4 Dancing Wellbeing

4.1 Context

On October 28th 2012, the community-led street procession-cum-performance *Connect*, created by the KJDC in conjunction with the Carnegie Dance Troupe, was staged in Vancouver's oldest district, the Downtown Eastside. Approximately 28 minutes in length, the choreography journeys between Carnegie Hall and Simon Fraser World Art Centre, and brought together 11 community dancers, four 'mentees' (based on an [apprenticeship-like](#)

model), and Jamieson. Well publicised as the country's 'poorest postcode', the DTES has been at the heart of a series of sensationalist reports about drug addiction (heroin and crack cocaine during the 1970s and 1980s), infectious diseases (specifically HIV-Aids and hepatitis, leading to the 1997 declaration of a public health crisis), prostitution and gender violence (including First Nation women), gentrification, and urban beautification (see Blomley, 1997, 2002; Proudfoot, 2011; Smith, 2003; Sommers, 1998; Sommers and Blomley, 2002). Yet, the neighbourhood is also widely recognised for its community-led activism (including the *Carrall Street Greenway* initiative), and, in more recent years, its annual arts festival. Resident organised, the *In the Heart of the City* festival has helped challenge media stereotypes by showcasing cross-community wellbeing and local creativity. However, post-2008, and with the Olympics fast approaching, the neighbourhood-run festival became enveloped within COV's wider healthy city marketing project (COV, 2009; see McLean, 2014a for a comparison).

Jamieson's choreography finds important nuances with the *Healthy Living* legislation, particularly through pioneering a dance-health body practice (Healthy People), and its emphasis on cultivating community inclusion and belonging amongst her participants (Healthy Communities). Nonetheless, the choreography's engagement with neighbourhood deprivation and trauma also opens possibilities for what McLean describes as 'interventions that address conflict and critique hegemonic politics' (2014b: 2157; see Kwon, 2004). In the context of *Connect*, trauma includes both historical injustices (the legacy of being First Nation and a legacy of racism),² and contemporary antagonists (open-air drug market, under-investment in social housing, neighbourhood upgrading, and isolation). The paper therefore contributes to debates at the intersection of neoliberal-inspired health legislation and creative city policies, about the ethical implications of artists – financially incentivised by government – into transforming 'vulnerable' individuals and communities (Healthy Environments). It also

makes a significant step as a rich empirical account about how the health-seeking subject is embodied, performed and contested.

4.2 Healthy People: The Energy Body Practice

What is potentially unusual about Vancouver's *Healthy City* ambitions is its coalescing of the creative industries to facilitate healthy people, communities, and urban environments (Figure 1). While this has, to varying degrees, been realised legislatively through increased public engagement in creative practices and increased financial support to artists engaging non-artist groups (such as Jamieson), Jamieson's approach to calling forth 'healthy people' was *implicitly embodied*. The performance artist most notably combines elements of classical dance (basic *ballet and* improvisational work) with *what can be* described as 'new spiritual practices of the self', *such as* ancient vinyasa yoga and Tai Chi (Philo et al., 2015). The result is an 'alternative' spiritual health-body movement form entitled the Energy Body Practice. Institutionalised through a semi-rigid and repetitive framework of verbal instructions and minimal body mentorship (re-aligning, adjusting, or extending participants movements; see Lea et al., 2016), her sessions actively encouraged community participants to embody an internalised mind-body-energy relationship. *Increased mind-body connection was presented as advancing individual sense of wellbeing and enabling a 'grounding' of the self.* The Energy Body Practice thus takes place within the realm of the inner experience (by visualising the flow of energy travelling through the body), as well as at a *muscular* level, as described in the paper's opening vignette. Jamieson explains,

'The Energy Body work is based on the connective tissue system as opposed to the muscle body. It looks to connect the mind with the body and follow pathways of impulse and motion within the body. It's an approach to dancing that's less about the body moving through space, and more about movement

through the body and opening up space within the body. (...) It takes the practitioner out of a position of ‘what does it look like’, into (...) ‘what am I sensing, where’s the motion’. (...) I’m drawing people’s attention to that sense of dance. Of connect.’

Highlighted within this account is Jamieson’s effort to embed a deeper anatomical knowledge of, and embodied sensibility toward, bodily movement among her participants. Community dancers were encouraged to be mindful of the flow of energy travelling through the body (both visualising and an embodied sensing of those inner impulses) and to view it as a tool of practice through which they might self-consciously ‘work through’ their inner pains. That is to say, by using an inner energy, participants could ‘express’ (see Figure 1) their painful experiences by transforming them into dance form. Here, Jamieson’s deployed Wilhelm Reich’s concept of muscle armours, by arguing that the physical artistic expression of inner pains would prevent the defensive build up and/or blockage of past traumas. The Carnegie Troupe’s embodied *practice* of de-traumatising the self can therefore be viewed as both a physical and emotional self-governance technique aimed at conditioning the ‘healthy’ subject (see Lea et al., 2016).

Participants enlisted a range of health-related terms to convey the internalised transformation they experienced by practicing and *embodying the* Energy Body. One describes the practice as a ‘meditative movement philosophy’ capable of restoring a sense of inner calm, while for another, it brought about a sense of ‘rootedness’ to the earth and feelings of connectedness to place. Integrating alternative health practices with dance similarly for another community dancer created a sense of grounding; of ‘grounding energy into the floor’ and bringing ‘that back up’ to restore the body and promote her *emotional* wellbeing. For one final participant, the process of its embodiment also enabled a temporary space in which to feel ‘safe and connected and integrated’ in the DTES. Nurturing health through participatory arts practices *thus* resonates with the 2014-2025 legislations sub-categories of ‘expressing

ourselves’, ‘feeling safe’, and building ‘critical connections’. It also speaks to a wider agenda of ‘building’ a particular ‘type’ of subject; the ‘active’, strong, self-governing and creative body that will contribute positively to society;

‘The workshops consistently begin with this (Energy Body) ‘Practice’. It works to focus the mind on breath, weight, energy and making connection within the body. Breath as meditative. Feeling connection to the earth, connection to each other, connecting to the energy. So we just build, like building a strong body. Building the dancing body.’

Nevertheless, the Energy Body practice was not only about re-creating postures and dance-yoga movement phrases. Rather, it was about re-educating the self, through the philosophies of yoga teaching, to live healthy ‘active’ lives (see Lea et al., 2016). Taking inspiration from Tai Chi’s visualisation of guiding qi (meaning life energy), Jamieson explores how negative inner emotions can be channelled through the body (through pushing the palms downwards while bending the knees) and transformed into a self-expressive physical form. Positive energy is, in this context, visualised as connecting to definitive spaces within the body to generate improved wellbeing. Deep rhythmic body-breath and mentally engaging in the flow of energised movement, in turn, develops teachings of qigong, which is a system that co-ordinates body posture and movement, with breathing and mediation so as to achieve self-healing, spirituality, equanimity and inner-balance. Addressing the ‘New Age’ philosophies, Jamieson spoke about engaging the ‘command centre’ or ‘third eye chakra’ (located in-between the eyebrows). This centre, she explained, is responsible for connecting mind and body, and enables spiritual energy from the environment to be brought into the body to enhance its healing. Jamieson’s effort to cultivate healthy people thus took place at the scale of the moving body, but also within the realms of the inner-self. It integrated a strong and mobile body, with a meditative and balanced mental state. Accordingly, the

Energy Body Practice [echoes](#) what Philo et al's., (2015) identify as the possibilities of yoga practice to facilitate a personal sense of wellbeing physically, mentally and spiritually. As one community dancer usefully reflected, 'who needs therapy when we can just dance. This is good for our souls!'

4.3 Healthy Communities: Transforming At Risk Communities

The second component of Vancouver's *A Healthy City For All* framework [focuses on](#) building healthy communities. 'Feeling safe and a sense of *inclusion* in our communities is essential to our well-being', while a 'strong sense of *belonging*', is identified as improving physical and mental health (COV, 2016a). Legislation implemented to achieve 'Healthy Communities' includes the *Cultural Plan for Vancouver* (2008-2018). Launched in the lead up to the [Winter](#) Games, the plan lays the foundations for artists to operate as community builders and agents of 'engaged citizenship', particularly within neighbourhoods identified as 'at risk'. COV (2015) argues that increased 'public participation and community engagement in arts and culture' can nurture the creation of 'vibrant, creative neighbourhoods'.

Jamieson was acutely aware of the DTES's political framing as '[vulnerable](#)' and proactively sought out the community [in the mid-1990s](#) as a space in which her participatory art practice could [enable](#) positive [transformations](#). She explains, those who 'gravitate toward there are suffering trauma'. Among the [Carnegie Troupe](#), neighbourhood traumas included racism, isolation, disconnectedness, and the grinding stress of poverty. In line with the health-arts alliance mobilised under the *Healthy City* rubric, the dance artist assumes the role of health 'giver' and neighbourhood enabler. In this role, Jamieson [imparts](#) a body-oriented mind-body practice as a 'drop in the bucket toward (community) health, wellbeing, and toward empowerment'. Rather than concentrating on dance steps however, her community

engaged practice [amalgamates](#) dance improvisation and the Energy Body to work through the ‘little and large traumas’ that ‘seize up’ the body. Jamieson explains, ‘you need to keep it moving through you (...) so they can transform one to another’. She continues,

‘I think dance, is transformative. And the practice of dance transforms. (...) It’s an opportunity for people to participate in something that is inherently healing, growing, inducing, transformative, enjoyable. Even if they do it once, that’s good (...), or keep going year after year and continue to struggle with whatever it is they are struggling with, which is often the case. It’s not like it’s a (...) magic cure, but I think it has that power. (...) Promotion of health and wellbeing, I mean that’s part of it. (...) But that’s, I think, what the capacity of dance is. It promotes that.’

The notion of an ‘engaged citizen’ in many ways underpins Jamieson’s participatory practice. This emerges most particularly through participants pro-actively [engaging](#) with other members of the community and [collaborating](#) creatively toward a shared sense of neighbourhood wellbeing. As one mentee identifies, the dance studio emerged as a ‘safe space’ to exchange ideas about local challenges. [Through the dancing body](#), participants could [translate into artistic form](#) their negative experiences of neighbourhood deprivation and racism, and self-govern their own neighbourhood ‘conflict resolution’ and ‘healing’. One participant also explained how ‘it kind of got us grounded’ in the physical setting of the DTES. *Connect* in this way rendered its community members bodies’ ‘present’ in a neighbourhood which has increasingly sought to exclude and criminalise those who fail to conform to [the city’s](#) image of [health and prudentialism](#) (whether through gentrification or anti-poverty legislation).

Dance participants equally identified how the community arts practice fostered a sense of belonging, both to the DTES and the dance troupe more specifically. [One](#) participant reflected on how the practice of dancing within a circle imparted a non-hierarchical

relationship across the multi-cultural participants. Rather than the social or racial exclusivity discussed in other accounts of creative city planning (see Parker, 2008), [another](#) participant argued that ‘it felt like we were connected at the same level’. Importantly for the choreographer, this enabled ‘dialogue across the group’ ([around deeply contentious issues such as racism](#)) and promoted a sense of group identity. For one mentee, participation in the neighbourhood arts festival also challenged socio-cultural isolation within the neighbourhood;

‘People feel pretty isolated I think (...). There’s a lot of sense that we’re all kind of living isolated lives with not a lot of interaction necessarily in our communities. And this is really a challenge for anyone to come in and participate with our class and dance. So it’s about community connection but there is also the connection that takes place I think on a more personal level (...), of that intimacy of personal connection and belonging that can mean quite a lot. (...) We’re talking about support and trust.’

Jamieson’s approach to calling forth healthy communities also emerged through her incorporation of multi-cultural arts practices, [as](#) reflected in the neighbourhood’s rich cultural tapestry. Here, Jamieson’s arts practice connects to the city’s 2014-2025 aims of enhanced community inclusivity through its emphasis on building connections across race divides. In the example of *Connect*, the choreographer draws together Contemporary dance [improvisation](#), with First Nation ceremonial traditions of cleansing and healing (e.g. the Smudge Ceremony), Chinese art forms and Qi Gong. For each community participant, embodying and practicing one or more of these art forms brought about an increased sense of wellbeing. The First Nation Deer Song, for example, was brought into the group by Deborah as a healing [song to](#) address her poor health. Jamieson explains, ‘Deborah danced it. Almost like, focusing on her getting well’. For another participant, embodying slow and meditative [Tai Chi moves](#) became a cathartic practice of mental wellbeing; ‘I tend to get depressed and anxious (...). I participate in that physical activity in order to regain health’. *Connect* for

Jamieson therefore, ‘has a power to heal and certainly connect. I would discuss it openly with the participants. This is a healing dance’. Yet, [what is of particular importance](#) is that the creation of *community* inclusivity emerged through a sharing of cultural practices and dance techniques, rather than an appropriation of cultural difference (see Leslie and Catungal, 2012). One mentee explains;

‘This *Connect* group is just about, ‘I’m x, this is my history, this is my background, let me share that’ and I think that resonates through the group (...). If your Chinese and you feel compelled to bring that side of your history then that’s what you’re bringing into the group (...). I think that’s actually a really important point because it’s not about cultural appropriation which is really important especially working with Native indigenous communities. We’re not trying to view white people imitating them, taking them over (...) because these are people in our community. They’re sharing and including them.’

The groups shared sense of cultural identity was [powerfully asserted](#) when other DTES residents challenged what was perceived as appropriation. Here, the Carnegie Dance Troupe defended their arts practice as a unification of its participant’s vibrant cultural diversity. [The pursuit of a multicultural dance practice therefore encouraged cultural exchanges across racial groups, and etched out practical, implicitly embodied, encounters for promoting community inclusivity \(see Shaw et al., 2011\).](#) Jamieson’s *Connect* has therefore become [something of](#) a success story for the city’s health-arts alliance, by displaying the power of the arts to work toward ‘inclusive’ neighbourhoods and facilitate the construction of ‘critical connections’ across a neighbourhood’s diverse, [often turbulent](#), cultural makeup.

4.4 Healthy Environments: Staging Urban Health Contradictions

[At its broadest scale](#), Vancouver’s *Healthy City* rubric is [concerned](#) with creating a healthy environment for *all* citizens. Healthy ‘social environments’ and a ‘well-planned built

environment’ inevitably played into the city’s wider marketing efforts to create the most ‘liveable’ urban landscape (see Healthy Living Vancouver, 2014). Yet, what is concealed within this lexicon is a culture-injected approach to urban health, which, in very material ways, targets ‘sick’ and ‘dirty’ neighbourhoods (see Harvie, 2005). Such spaces, and accompanying individuals, are presented as failing to conform to the desired health imaginary circulated and requiring immediate correction. Following Leslie Kern, such morally charged health-oriented agendas ‘can work to marginalise (...) those who are socially constructed as unhealthy’ (2015: 79). Consequently, in this final section, I examine how participatory art practices can push back at the exclusionary nature of urban health discourses, and open a counter-space in which participants are able to voice their negative experiences of urban revitalisation (see McLean, 2014b).

Widely perceived as an urban blight on Vancouver’s cityscape, the DTES, in the years adjoining the Winter Olympics, was positioned as a landscape requiring the immediate injection of culture. Under the banner of ‘*The Great Beginnings: Old Streets, New Pride Project*’ (2008-), a series of art projects, including mosaics, anti-graffiti art, temporary ‘window dressing’ (of derelict shops), and a ‘beautification pilot project’ were implemented throughout the neighbourhood (COV, 2009). Emphasis was placed on improving the visual appearance of social and economic wellbeing within the DTES, and involved the targeting of spaces of homelessness, dilapidation, graffiti and economic disinvestment (criteria stipulated measuring ‘visual change’). Notwithstanding an obvious failure to address the underlying determinants of health (such as poverty),³ the arts-based approach to urban intervention also iterates what Jen Harvie describes as a ‘colonial discourse’ of ‘cleaning up’ immoral environments. Given the area’s high concentration of First Nation peoples, this indicates a continuing process of othering and exclusion, and stands in stark contrast to the image of multiculturalism marketed during the 2010 Cultural Olympiad.

Encompassed into the *Healthy City For All* legislation, *The Great Beginnings* project, also adopted the more inciting language, and long-term ambitions, of [revitalisation and regeneration](#). The [Cultural Director](#) of Cultural Services explains, the Can \$10 million project ‘came out of a *gift* from the Province to the City, 2008, before the Olympics to *clean up* the DTES in recognition of the founding communities – acknowledging their value’. Enhancing ‘community pride, liveability, and public appeal’ (COV, 2009) of Vancouver’s first urban area was thus premised as achievable, in part, through the tactical implementation of a range of cultural activities and participatory arts festivals. Amongst which [was](#) the *In the Heart of the City* festival, [which has continued to see collaborative](#) partnerships between *Great Beginnings* and DTES cultural organisations.

Read alongside the Games, the *Great Beginnings* project extends upon a much larger, and sustained effort to decriminalise, beautify, and, I would argue, improve the profitability of the neighbourhood. The launch of the [Carrall Street Greenway](#) initiative, in particular, sought to use the Winter Olympics to showcase Vancouver’s ‘liveability’ (see Klauser, 2012; Kearns and Philo, 1993). It did so, however, by incorporating elements of broken window tactics and different modalities of surveillance; including the introduction of ‘refuges for homelessness during the 2010 Olympics’ (COV, 2009; see *Assistance to Shelter Act* and the *Cold/Wet Weather Strategies*). While Vancouver’s health-seeking subject epitomises prudentialism by self-managing their wellbeing, the DTES subject [is morally reproached as](#) neglectful. Claims of dysfunctionality have derived out of calls for state housing and social service support. [The](#) language of social irresponsibility has, [in turn](#), been applied to the neighbourhood’s ‘illicit’ employment industries (prostitution and panhandling) and its intemperate residents (alcoholics and addicts). But more than this, [discourses](#) of irresponsibility [have](#) also fed into a justification narrative for mitigating those spaces that undermine the health lexicon publicised; [including](#) banishing individuals from partaking in questionable, [though not illegal](#),

health practices such as picking from the trash (Boyle and Haggerty, 2011; Proudfoot, 2011). The emphasis placed on a criminogenic discourse effectively diverts attention away from the legacies of urban disenfranchisement, social service withdrawal (particularly mental health institutions post-1994), racial tensions, and escalating housing insecurities (including a loss of single room occupancy hotels) facing the neighbourhood. Moreover, it transfers responsibility solely onto the individual. By addressing the wider context of the entrenchment of urban health inequalities, Jamieson's *Connect* renders present the exclusionary nature of the *Healthy City* lexicon. This, I argue, holds important implications for destabilising the desired apolitical healthy subject celebrated. The choreography thus signals the potential for radical participatory arts practices to take shape within neoliberal health initiatives, and open space for their contestation.

Interestingly, the choreographer was keenly aware of her ambiguous role within the *In the Heart of the City* festival. For instance, post-2008, the festival was incorporated into the *Great Beginnings* project, due to its capabilities of 'building community inclusion, acceptance, capacity-building, relationships, and pride' (COV, 2009). Rather than have her art serve the politically motivated aspiration of 'building healthy relationships' however, Jamieson states;

'My approach to community engaged art is about serving art. I believe that the art creates community, creates healing. But what I'm not interested in is having the art serve community building, or serve goals of health (...). It has enormous power but (...) I won't put dance into service of political legislation or professional goals.'

Neither did the *Connect* participants shy away from difficult topics affecting their neighbourhood's insecure health. Instead, the choreographic process was productively informed by their negative experiences of urban revitalisation. One participant in particular

offered a scathing critique of how gentrification and a lack of affordable housing within the area prevented her from living in a healthy social environment. *Performing Connect* within the *Heart of the City* festival, thus became a public platform to uncover the exclusionary nature of COV's health agenda, which, on the one hand, sought to 'celebrate the history, culture and people of the DTES' (COV, 2009, 2014b), while at the same time, criminalise its people, and accelerate their displacement; 'Gentrification big time. Criminalising the poor, which is a real problem in our estates. (...) We're just losing a lot of the *feel* of the community now it's all gentrified'. Others demonstrated a level of scepticism about efforts to include marginalised residents into newly gentrified spaces, and of the 'social-mix' aspect (200 non-market units) of projects such as Pearson Investment Group's revamping of the Woodward's site (now the Simon Fraser building; see Blomley, 2008). One mentee expands, 'I think that the space is really excluding. It's very polished, it's very brand new, it's funded by a big gold company. I mean what more can you do to make it unapproachable'. *Great Beginnings* partnership with the community festival thus brings to the fore how residents are enlisted as performers of improved urban wellbeing in a landscape, which they are concurrently (financially) excluded from (see McLean, 2014b). For festival participants, I argue that the annual event demands local government and artists alike think ethically about how they include 'at risk' communities in future healthy city legislation, but also, to do so in ways that are attentive to the underlying determinants of health.

So to, through discussions with *Connect* participants it was possible to reflect critically on the entrenchment of racial inequalities within the neighbourhood. In one respect, while *Great Beginnings* portrays the festival as a celebration of Chinese, Japanese, European, and First Nations cross-cultural wellbeing, it equally glosses over what Jamieson describes as continued 'cultural collisions'. Through a discussion of her daily experiences of racism, one heavily accented participant recounts how performances of cultural inclusivity can mask

continued acts of discrimination, and conceal feelings of fear felt among Chinese residents. Reflecting on her potentially colonising position in the community project, one mentee adds, ‘all five of us women (Karen and her mentees) are white women’. (...) Outside of *Connect* I felt my involvement in the community system challenged (...) I’ve been kind of trying to unpack that for quite a long time. What does it mean to be involved? There’s a really good book, *Unsettling the Settler Within*’ (see McLean, 2014a; 2014b). Framing her experiences through the history of colonialism, this mentee usefully identifies how her white, middle class position within the community could reinforce racial exclusion. As a result she was keen to destabilise her positionality as ‘saviour’, responsible for healing the community and enhancing the wellbeing of its residents (see Harvie, 2005).

Committed to working with these contradictions, Jamieson purposely integrates the participant’s negative experiences of urban health strategies into the street procession. As a result, the choreography engaged with specific spaces that reflected the area’s health insecurities. One community dancer explains, ‘we stopped at various landmarks and recognised the land and what has been happening in the DTES (...). Taking the time to physically recognise those spots was really important and then dancing in certain spaces that were recognisable to people I think was also very deliberate’. These locations thus became spaces in which to perform what Kwon (2004) describes as radical social praxis. This included engaging participants in the causal factors of (insecure) urban health; escalating costs of housing (fuelled by Olympic-inspired gentrification), retrenchments in basic services (health care services), food insecurities, and racism (see Ayo, 2012). In contrast to the *Healthy City* framework, *Connect* testifies to participant’s embodied, visceral experiences of a decline in affordable houses (and increased homelessness), a reliance on food banks, the closure of social service centres, and cross-cultural tensions. Furthermore, it also challenges city government to recognise their contributing role to the material factors determining why

the neighbourhood fails to comply with the city's liveability agenda (see Herrick, 2009; Malley, 2014; Marmot, 2005). For this reason, *Connect* opens the possibility to critique the socially exclusionary nature of urban health legislation, and the uneven or unequal health makeover being experienced within the neighbourhood (see Kern, 2015). Community-led arts festival can therefore operate as powerful voices for often silenced individuals to speak out against the exclusivity of urban health legislation that favours those who can afford to embody a wellbeing lifestyle.

5 Conclusion

This paper documented the emergence of a conspicuously Anglo-American health phenomenon as it has been formed and *practiced* in Vancouver's DTES. By outlining legislative changes in the post-2008 era, I uncovered how COV mobilised the language of wellbeing to cultivate 'healthy cities and healthy peoples'. This I accredited to a conscious merging of the health and arts industries in the years abutting the Winter Olympics. Prominent within this marketing strategy was an attempt to improve the city's economic competitiveness by promoting its urban 'liveability' (which inevitably appealed to a particular type of 'lifestyle'-seeking subject). Legislative attempts to call forth health-seeking subjects was, at the same time, accompanied by a series of urban socio-spatial policies, and a moral lexicon, aimed at mitigating those individuals and neighbourhoods that failed to embody the wellness imaginary circulated. The *Great Beginnings* project, in particular, demonstrated how the arts-health alliance was implemented as part of an effort to improve the *visual* appearance of urban wellbeing in the DTES. Through an alignment with the neighbourhoods *Heart of the City* festival, this legislation sought to promote neighbourhood wellbeing while masking and even beautifying the underlying socio-economic determinants crippling the area.

I argued that *Connect* found important nuances with each component of Vancouver's *Healthy City* framework. By means of Jamieson's Energy Body practice, I explored how

wellbeing was consciously scripted onto the Carnegie dancers as part of an effort to cultivate ‘healthy’ people. New age philosophies of health (specifically yoga) were incorporated into Jamieson’s community arts practice to create grounded and functional individuals who proactively [self-governed](#) their minds and bodies. In a different vein, Jamieson drew upon the DTES rich cultural make-up (including First Nation and Chinese) in her arts practice to nurture cross-community inclusivity and belonging. Her working practice thus became a success story for the city’s health-arts alliance by displaying the potential of the arts to build ‘inclusive’, healthy neighbourhoods. Rather than position the [choreographer](#) (and arts festival) as solely complicit in promoting COV health legislation, I argued that Jamieson situated her choreography within the concerns (gentrification, racism, social [isolation](#)) of the neighbourhood. In doing so, the community participants [critiqued](#) the exclusionary nature of COV’s health lexicon, which enrolled participants as performers of health, whilst at the same time excluded them through neighbourhood upgrading practices. The paper therefore provides a valuable example of the ambiguous role artists can play in healthy city planning.

This paper offers three notable contributions to the discipline of geography. First, this research enriches studies of healthy city planning, and the formation of the health-seeking subject. This was achieved through a rich empirical account of the role of community arts practices in coercing participants into embodying and [performing](#) individual and community wellbeing. In this way, I renew critical dialogues between [urban](#) geography and the language and practices of performance. Second, I extend research on ‘new’ legislative alliances, specifically how the arts and healthy cities discourses have become increasingly prominent within creative city marketing strategies. Most notably, I offered a rich empirical account of Vancouver’s *Healthy City For All* legislation, and teased through how it has encompassed elements of the ‘creative’. Further research is nevertheless needed to explore the complex and contested role artists play in nurturing health within vulnerable communities. Finally, this

paper reaffirmed research into the potential exclusionary nature of urban health legislation (Herrick, 2009; Rawlins, 2008), and how artists can be complicit in normalising inequalities. Rather than offering a warning against community art practices engaging in dialogues around city governance initiatives, I encourage artists to continue to open space for what Kwon (2004) identifies as ‘radical social praxis’.

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Footnotes

1. Dworkin and Wachs write, ‘She leans, lilts or languishes, displaying a lean, tight, compact body beneath monochromatic smooth skin, in tight, revealing clothing’ (2009: 1).
2. The 1884 Anti-Potlatch Law marked the onset of a 71-year period of sustained attempts to abolish Native culture. In turn, the piece draws attention to a history of racism; from the Head Tax (1885, 1901, 1903) under the Act to Restrict and Regulate

Chinese Immigration (1885), to the race riots of 1887 and economic disputes in 1890, and the imprisonment of Japanese residents under the 1941 War Measures Act (see McDonald, 2011).

3. 64% of the population were classified as low-income persons in 2006 (COV, 2014b).